

Assessment of students, teachers and schools

Work file 5: Assessment of students – the influence of assessment on self-concepts

Assessment in school is a wide-open field. It not only has influence on explicit things that can be observed such as students' qualifications, their positioning in society because of grades and thus their academic career. Assessment in school also has influence on other aspects within the individual such as self-image, self-esteem and the general concept one has about his or her own competences and abilities. School has got enormous influence on the self-concept of competences. Its direct influence depends on the way assessment is chosen and carried out in school.

Social criterion

Because of the social context in which learning in school takes place, using the social criterion as a measure can give essential information about competences in comparison to other students. At the same time estimates about competences in a comparative social perspective strongly influence the self-image and self-concept of students.

Individual criterion

Using the individual criterion for assessment means comparing intra-individual differences with each other. What is the difference between the student's achievement in EDC/HRE last month and now? It is a temporary comparison that is used here. Young students especially tend to prefer this criterion as a tool for assessment. The amount of "added value" is being recorded over a certain amount of time. This makes it possible to give feedback to the student about the range of his or her achievement as well as the way in which it has increased or decreased. Achievement is not compared to the achievement of other students. It is the progress which is in the focus. This way of assessment also corresponds with the informal learning processes that take place out of school where the student evaluates his or her own competences autonomously.

Objective criterion

Academic achievement is being compared with a learning objective. An individually achieved learning progress is being compared with a realistically reachable goal. This way of assessment is an objective-based norm and informs about the approach to a goal which is defined as the perfect achievement. Comparing the student's achievement with other students' learning progress is not of importance. Criteria-based tests are oriented towards clearly defined goals. They measure the achievement with reference to a certain characteristic decided by the teacher. This also means that the teacher has to set and present the goals the students have to approach in their achievement. Thus, achievements of the student will not be compared to the ones of other students. According to various studies in this field, social processes of comparisons between students only start when there is no objective criterion used in assessment.

What are the results of this discussion? If a teacher wants to strengthen the self-image and self-concept of his or her students, assessment should happen following an objective criterion. Goals given by the teacher have to be clear and have to be communicated to the students.